

EXPERT GROUP REPORT
FOR
AWARDS SEEKING ADMISSION TO
THE UCAS TARIFF

BTEC National Certificate and Diploma in Early Years

February 2005

BTEC National Certificate and Diploma in Early Years

Background and Context

In 2002 UCAS undertook a comparability study of the BTEC Nationals as a qualification group¹, which resulted in the allocation of UCAS tariff points to the BTEC National Award, Certificate and Diploma (see Annex 1).

However, the BTEC National Certificate and Diploma in Early Years requires students to undertake an extensive professional placement. This represents an additional source of achievement for them which may be of relevance for progression to Higher Education. In October 2003 Edexcel requested that UCAS consider the recognition of this Professional Placement element for the allocation of UCAS tariff points. A similar Professional Practice Component for the CACHE Diploma² has already been included in the UCAS Tariff, and this provides a strong rationale for the current study.

Methodology

Rather than convene a full expert group meeting it was judged by UCAS, in consultation with Dr Geoff Hayward, that the benchmarking of BTEC programme against the CACHE (Level 3) Diploma in Child Care and Education's (DCE) Professional Practice element could be expedited by asking by a Higher Education admissions tutor, who used both qualifications for admissions purposes, to provide an expert opinion. To this end Dr Kate Wilkinson, Senior Lecturer in Early Years at the School of Education, University College Chester, was engaged.

To provide this expert opinion, Dr Wilkinson was provided with the following documentation from Edexcel:

- Details of the professional placement
- Guidance for students
- Professional practice assessment log
- Exemplar from a participating College
- BTEC Edexcel level 3 BTEC National in Early Years – guidance and units 2003

In addition Dr Wilkinson was provided with:

- CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Child Care & Education Candidate Handbook (2004)
- Copy of a DCE student's Medium Term Planning for nursery unit (3-4 years) (2003)

Using this information Dr Wilkinson was asked to consider whether the professional placement element of the Edexcel Nationals in Early Years compares favourably with that of the CACHE Diploma in Child Care & Education. Such a comparison was to be based upon considerations of the relative size and demand of the different placements, and their relevance in terms of progression to higher education.

¹ See <http://www.ucas.com/candq/tariff/btec.doc>

² See <http://www.ucas.com/candq/tariff/CACHE301101.pdf>

Programme Structure and Assessment Model

The BTEC Nationals use a standard approach in their specifications, assessment and quality assurance and this is reflected in the specifications for *Unit 6: Professional Practice* of the National Certificate and Diploma in Early Years. Edexcel state that this Unit is specifically designed to assess the ability of candidates to apply their skills and knowledge within the work setting.

The specification for the professional Practice Unit requires that the student should undertake four different work placement settings, with the placements covering four age ranges: 0-1 years; 1-2 years; 1-4 years; and 4-8 years. A detailed and mandatory longitudinal study must be undertaken with a child under 12 months of age.

Over this range of practice placements with children of different ages, the candidate must demonstrate that they have achieved five learning outcomes, in the four practice settings, with the four age ranges:

- Outcome 1 – Observe and identify the individual needs of the child appropriate to the requirements of the setting;
- Outcome 2 – Respond appropriately to the needs of the individual child;
- Outcome 3 – Demonstrate workplace expectations of a professional carer;
- Outcome 4 – Promote a stimulating learning environment for children's development;
- Outcome 5 – Explore personal effectiveness as a worker in Early Years service and evaluate own performance.

A justifiable concern about any professional practice placement is the assurance of the quality of the experience offered by that placement, and the validity and reliability of the assessment made about a student's competence during the placement. Thus special attention needs to be paid to these issues.

The Professional Practice component of the Diploma is subject to special scrutiny by the External Verifiers of the National Certificate and Diploma in Early Years. For example Edexcel's External Verifiers are required to monitor the Professional Practice placement activity at least twice during the two years of the BTEC National Diploma in Early Years. During each of these visits, the External Verifier is asked to report on the following:

- Centre provision for placements. Are suitable placements available for all learners?
- Range of placements. Do the placements provide for all four age groups?
- Logbooks. Are logbooks provided and are they a suitable record of placement activity?
- Logbook completion. Are logbooks completed correctly and promptly?
- Tutor Support. Is there evidence of tutor support and confirmation of learning outcomes?
- Internal verification. Is there evidence of internal verification of logbooks and cross monitoring of placement activity?

A good deal of emphasis is placed by Edexcel on the responsibility of Professional Practice assessors to appoint suitably qualified placement supervisors for the National Diploma Early Years. From the Professional Practice log book:

“The role of the placement supervisor requires careful appointment. ...Supervisors should hold one of the following qualifications:

1. Early Years teaching qualification
2. Child care qualification at level 3 or above plus two years post qualifying experience
3. Paediatric Nursing or health visiting qualification
4. Social Work qualification.”

This unit is internally assessed by courses tutors, with both internal and external moderation of those assessment decisions. A number of contextualised assessment criteria³ are provided for each learning outcome and a candidate must demonstrate achievement against all of these in order to pass the unit. It is the use of these assessment criteria that is expected to lead to consistency and parity between different tutors making assessment decisions. Assessment of a student’s performance is made on the basis of a completed Professional Practice Logbook. This log sets out each of the learning outcomes to be achieved and the associated assessment criteria. In addition, it provides the learner with clarification of the manner in which the learning outcomes may be achieved.

The practice supervisor is intimately involved in assessing the progress of the students and the extent to which they are meeting the five learning outcomes listed above. The Professional Practice log book expands on this role of the placement supervisor.

“The workplace supervisor will need to understand the importance of honest and fair assessments. They will need to understand that they have a **duty** to identify when a student is not competent in a particular part of their work. They are part of the quality assurance process and must be fully briefed as to their role in the standard of Early Years care and education.”

“The Professional Practice Log must contain a Summary Report of the student’s competence and ability (Form EY 6) that is signed by the Course Tutor. This signature will be the indication that the student is competent and able to perform the necessary tasks and duties required by an Early Year’s worker at this level. **It must not be signed lightly**”.

“Correct accreditation of candidates is crucial to the credibility of this and other Early Years awards. Placement supervisors must feel comfortable in refusing to sign records of evidence from candidates if they do not feel that the candidate is competent in the task(s). Equally they should be comfortable in awarding credit where it is due, even if it is only for one-assessment criterion”.

³ In total there are 19 such criteria distributed across the five outcomes.

Edexcel clearly recognise that the validity and reliability of the internal assessment of their programmes requires a complex and demanding system of quality assurance. This is provided through their system of internal and external modification of the centres offering their programmes. Details of these quality assurance measures relevant to this programme can be found in two Edexcel publications - *Additional Guidance BTEC National Diploma and Certificate in Early Years* (December, 2004) and *Signposts to Quality, BTEC Provision made easy* (December 2004).

Students are awarded Distinction, Merit or Pass grades for this unit using explicit grading criteria.

The Expert Opinion

Edexcel, through *Unit 6: Professional Practice* requires students to devote a minimum of 800 hours to professional practice and CACHE DCE students a minimum of 750 hours of practice. In the view of Dr Wilkinson, the additional 50 hours required of students by the BTEC qualification was a reflection of Edexcel providing more time in which to achieve the specified learning outcomes rather than representing an additional volume of study. The expert opinion is, therefore, that the professional placements are comparable in size.

Dr Wilkinson also provided a breakdown of the assessment demands of the professional practice in both the Edexcel and CACHE qualifications in the table below.

Edexcel	CACHE DCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 longitudinal child study (possibly min of 4 observations and one resultant summary and course of action) • 16 observations** (4 observations of the four areas of development in 4 stages) 	20 Written observations**
The demands of the student's observational work are therefore equal (at an assumed minimum level)	
Evidence of plans, reports and evaluation of activities required every week of a placement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 plans (assuming an 8-hour day over 800 hours expected placement experience) 	Portfolio of plans (maximum 25)
The demands of the student's work in planning for development are not equal (at an assumed minimum level)	
Critical analysis of daily work in practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 critical analyses (assuming an 8-hour day over 800 hours expected placement experience) 	Practice Evidence Records (spans 750 hours placement)

* where a series of observations (possibly 4 as a minimum) leads to one resultant summary showing analysis and possible course of action

** where an observation includes written analysis and suggested course of action

Dr Wilkinson concluded that the demands on the student in both cases were similar.

However, in her initial two reports, Dr Wilkinson raised a number of important quality assurance issues that needed to be resolved. In part this reflects the position put by Dr Wilkinson that:

“University staff are generally more suspicious of an 'evidence-based' approach qualification, it may not prepare the student as well for a programme of study at HE level - I see this myself in some of the students I teach on our Foundation Degree - they are not as well equipped for the academic rigour expected of them, their marks are always the lowest and verge on borderline pass/fail.”

Dr Wilkinson’s initial reports were read by Dr Hayward and he recommended that UCAS ask Edexcel to address the important quality assurance issues that she was quite appropriately raising. A very detailed response was forthcoming with additional documentation supplied by Edexcel. On the basis of this response to her concerns, Dr Wilkinson stated:

“The additional information that has been sent was informative and has helped me to grasp a clearer view of the quality assurance systems in place which were giving me some concern in my previous report. As a result I was very pleased to be directed to the recently introduced ‘*Additional Guidance BTEC National Diploma and Certificate in Early Years*’, (December 2004) and ‘*Signposts to Quality, BTEC provision made easy*’, (December 2004). I was particularly reassured to be informed that these quality assurance matters were communicated through training, networking and updating events – training I consider to be the most important of these. I also acknowledge the context in which the Professional Practice element exists in that this should not be considered in isolation.”

I have been provided with sufficient information to be reassured of the part played by Edexcel’s quality assurance systems and that tutors and assessors roles feature in support of this process – more so than I had at first been led to believe ... As a result of this later communication highlighting the context of the placement element, the information about the process of developing reflective practice and pre-requisites (for Units 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 17 and 18) alongside the regular audit undertaken by QCA, I am more reassured that the Performance Elements in this programme are quality assured and rigorous.”

Recommendations

The conclusion reached, as a result of a protracted and rigorous debate, is that the volume and demand of the professional practice components of the CACHE and BTEC qualifications (Level 3) in Early Years are comparable. The expert group who worked on the CACHE DCE elected to treat the Practice Element effectively as a stand alone qualification equivalent in size and demand to a VCE A level. The recommendation is that the Edexcel Professional Practice Unit should be treated in the same way. This makes it effectively equivalent to a BTEC Award which attracts 120 points to a Distinction, 80 for a Merit and 40 for a Pass. The recommendation is, therefore, that attainment in the BTEC National Certificate and Diploma Professional Practice Unit should receive the following allocation of UCAS Tariff Points:

- Distinction – 120
- Merit – 80
- Pass – 40.

However, allocating points on this basis would mean that the professional placement unit was being counted twice – once in the points awarded to the BTEC National Certificate and Diploma and again to the points awarded to the Professional Placement. Therefore, the points awarded to the theory element of the Certificate and Diploma have been reduced by 40 Tariff points per available grade (20 points per unit x 2 as the Professional Placement unit has a weighting of 2.0 units).

The resulting values are reported in the table below:

BTEC Nationals						Points	CACHE Diploma	
Award	Certificate	Diploma	Early Years				Theory	Practical
			Theory		Practical			
			Certificate	Diploma				
		DDD				360		
		DDM		DDD		320		
		DMM		DDM		280		
	DD	MMM		DMM		240	A	
	DM	MMP	DD	MMM		200	B	
	MM	MPP	DM	MMP		160	C	
D	MP	PPP	MM	MPP	D	120	D	A
						100		B
M	PP		MP	PPP	M	80	E	C
						60		D
P			PP		P	40		E

Dr Geoff Hayward
February 13th 2005

GCE/VCE Qualifications			BTEC Nationals ¹			CACHE Diploma ²		Diploma in Foundation Studies (Art and Design) ³	Points	Irish Leaving Cert ⁴		Scottish Qualifications				Welsh Bacc Core ⁵
GCE AS/ AS VCE	GCE A level/ AVCE	AVCE Double Award	Award	Certificate	Diploma	Theory	Practical			Higher	Ordinary	Advanced Higher	Higher	Intermediate 2	Standard Grade	
					DDD				360							
					DDM				320							
								Distinction	285							
					DMM				280							
		AA		DD	MMM	A			240							
								Merit	225							
		AB							220							
		BB		DM	MMP	B			200							
		BC							180							
								Pass	165							
		CC		MM	MPP	C			160							
		CD							140							
	A	DD	D	MP	PPP	D	A		120		A				Pass	
	B	DE					B		100		B					
									90	A1						
	C	EE	M	PP		E	C		80		C					
									77	A2						
									72		D	A				
									71	B1						
									64	B2						
A	D						D		60			B				
									58	B3						
									52	C1						
B									50							
									48		C					
									45	C2						
									42		D	A				
C	E		P				E		40							
									39	C3	A1					
									38					Band 1		
									35				B			
									33	D1						
D									30							
									28			C		Band 2		
									26	D2	A2					
E									20	D3	B1					
									14		B2					
									7		B3					

¹ The points shown for the newly specified BTEC National Award, Certificate and Diploma come into effect for entry to higher education in 2005 onwards

² Covers the CACHE Diploma in Child Care and Education

³ The points for the Diploma in Foundation Studies (Art and Design) come into effect for entry to higher education in 2006 onwards

⁴ The points shown for the Irish Leaving Certificate Higher and Ordinary levels, come into effect for entry to higher education in 2006 onwards

⁵ Points for the Core of the Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification come into effect for entry to HE in 2005 onwards

